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SUBJECT: MUSLIM ORGANIZATION PRODUCING MOVIE FOCUSED ON
COMBATING INTOLERANCE

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Muhammadiyah--one of Indonesia's largest Muslim organizations with over 35 million members--is producing a movie designed to promote religious tolerance. Muhammadiyah has teamed up with Indonesian National Intelligence (BIN), the police, and an ex-leader of the terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah to produce the three-part documentary, which outlines the transformation of a former Islamic hardliner into a national promoter of tolerance. The producers plan for the movie to be distributed to over 15,000 educational institutions. Muhammadiyah hopes the movie can help turn the young away from intolerance. END SUMMARY.

AN AMBITIOUS PROJECT

¶2. (SBU) Muhammadiyah is joining the fight against extremism by embarking on a large-scale film project. The three-part film will outline the life of Ahmad Syafi'i Maarif from his early days as an Islamic fundamentalist to his becoming one of Indonesia's leading activists for pluralism, democracy, and interfaith tolerance. In producing the movie, Muhammadiyah is working in close coordination with BIN, the police and former Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) member Nasir Abas.

¶3. (SBU) The plan is to launch three separate staggered documentaries at Indonesia's largest cinemas with the hope of reaching nearly one million viewers per film. After the launching, the Muhammadiyah team will distribute copies of the film to the estimated 15,000 educational institutions within the Muhammadiyah network. Muhammadiyah is still in the process of seeking the necessary funding (nearly one million U.S. dollars), but several donors are on board.

A FASCINATING STORY

¶4. (U) As touched on, the movie will deal with Syafi'i Maarif, a well-known Indonesian promoter of tolerance. Part one will chronicle Maarif's early years spent as an Islamic hardliner and supporter of the Islamic political party Masyumi. As a young activist, Maarif--who is now 74--advocated for the creation of an Islamic state in Indonesia, albeit through peaceful means. (Note: Masyumi was Indonesia's largest Islamic party in the 1950s. The party was later banned by former president Sukarno on the grounds that its leaders had supported a regional rebellion in Sumatra and in eastern Indonesia.)

¶5. (U) Part two will focus on Maarif's time in the United States when Maarif studied at the University of Chicago under the Pakistani thinker Fazlur Rahman. Maarif sought out Rahman in hopes of gaining enough knowledge of Islam to

convert Indonesia into an Islamic state. However, Maarif later chronicles that it was through his discussions with Rahman that he was able to get off "the path of fundamentalism which was filled with flaming spirit but empty from deep, contemplative thoughts." He claims to have never found the term "Islamic state" in the Koran or any other classical Islamic literature. Consequently, he concluded it was a modern invention and thus found no justification for fighting for it. Maarif returned to Indonesia where he faced criticism from the hardline community, called a "pawn" of the United States, and accused of betraying the political ideas of Masyumi's founding father Mohammad Natsir.

¶6. (U) Part three will follow Maarif's rise to national notoriety as a defender of democracy, pluralism, and interreligious dialogue. He is now considered an icon of Islamic pluralism, defender of Pancasila--core Indonesian principles embracing pluralism--and a beacon of hope for a democracy in which people of all faiths have equal rights. The final chapter of the segment will consist of interviews with leading national figures, including former Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) and former vice president Jusuf Kalla, among others.

A POSITIVE STEP FORWARD

¶7. (C) The aim is to have the project completed by early next year. It is a positive step forward for Muhammadiyah, which (newly) admits that hardliners are a growing force in its ranks. It also serves as a positive example of Indonesians working to prevent the rise of radicalism. In addition to the movie, Muhammadiyah is considering other steps focused on curbing any drift by the young toward

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radicalism.

¶8. (C) Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, faces similar issues to those faced by Muhammadiyah and the group has launched some small-scale localized efforts to combat extremism. That said, NU--though its institutional heart is in the right place--is not as well organized and lacks Muhammadiyah's strong national leadership, so a concerted NU effort is not in sight at this point. (Note: Negotiations are still underway to distribute the Muhammadiyah film to around 5,000 state-run schools and to the vast pesantren network controlled by Nahdlatul Ulama.)

HUME